DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 299 605 CS 506 390

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TITLE Assurance through Performance: The Iran-Contra Hearings as Celebration.
PUB DATE Nov 88
NOTE 32p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (74th, New Orleans, LA, November 3-6, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Community Attitudes; Discourse Analysis; Foreign Policy; Government Role; *Hearings; Mass Media Role; *Persuasive Discourse; *Rhetorical Criticism
IDENTIFIERS Classical Rhetoric; *Epideictic Rhetoric; Government Citizen Relationship; *Iran Contra Hearings; Watergate

ABSTRACT

Drawing on Michael Halloran's genre of public proceedings, the Iran-contra hearings can be viewed from a celebratory or epideictic perspective, with several conceptualizations of the genre combined to illuminate the functions of the hearings. The primary function of the hearings, at least from an epideictic viewpoint, was the reassurance of the community as to the continued validity of its values and system of government. The hearings can be seen as constituting a socially defined significant event, the occurrence of which is more important than the specific content. The perceived legitimacy of the hearings takes on critical importance in order for the "performance" of the hearings to achieve its goal of community continuance. The primary epideictic function was accomplished largely by means of what Walter Beale terms the rhetorical performative: the mere act of the hearings, defined by our system and made by our media into a significant event, could accomplish this reassuring function. Specific content may be important only so long as it adds to the appearance of legitimacy. This rhetorical situation may represent an ultimate genre of "democratic discourse," typifying the need to strengthen the community in the course of any major political/rhetorical event. The Iran-contra hearings certainly reinforced the power and necessity of epideictic rhetoric in contemporary American political rhetoric. (Sixty-five notes are attached.) (RAE)

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Assurance Through Performance:

The Iran-contra Hearings as Celebration

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Presented to the
Seventy-Fourth Annual Meeting of the
Speech Communication Association
New Orleans, Louisiana
November 1988

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on Halloran's genre of public proceedings, the Iran-contra hearings are viewed from an epideictic perspective, with several conceptualizations of the genre being combined to illuminate the functions of the hearings. The primary function of the hearings, at least from an epideictic viewpoint, is the reassurance of the community of the continued validity of its values and system of government. The hearings are seen as constituting a socially defined significant event, the occurrence of which is more important than the specific content. The perceived legitimacy of the hearings takes on critical importance in order for the "performance" of the hearings to achieve its goal of community continuance.

In July 1974, the televised debate of the House Judiciary Committee on the impeachment of Richard Nixon significantly changed the American political scene. Granted, televised proceedings were not entirely new, nor for that matter were Congressional hearings on corruption or wrong-doing in government, including debate on impeachment. But the combination of the two had far reaching implications for our political system and, perhaps more importantly, the public's view of it. Thirteen years later, the American public was to bear witness to another televised public hearing with similar implications: the Iran-contra hearings, held from May 5 to August 3, 1987.

The 1974 impeachment proceedings were used as a guiding example in the outlining of a genre of public proceedings by Halloran.[1] The business of representative bodies involving decision-making held before the body's constituents was characterized as a unique and important genre in the rhetoric of contemporary America. Among other characteristics, Halloran discussed the celebratory, or epideictic, aspects of public proceedings. However, there are significant differences between the two sets of hearings, even beyond their specific content. As pointed out by Halloran, the House Judiciary Committee's proceedings were to include official action--whether or not to advise the House of Representatives to impeach President Nixon. The House and Senate committees involved in the Iran-contra hearings were to make no such significant decision. Their goal, as stated by many of those involved in both their opening statements and throughout the hearings, was to uncover the facts, present them to the American people, and make recommendations in their report as to any changes that could be enacted to prevent a similar occurrence in the future.[2] But the emphasized

goal of the hearings was to uncover the facts, to answer such questions as "What did the president know?" and "Where did all the money go?" The recommendations were to come later, as a part of their report. Halloran himself clarified the difference: "Yet there is a difference in that the hearing, unlike a true public proceeding, cannot include official action by the body."[3]

Thus, as I pondered the question of how to categorize these hearings generically, Halloran's genre of public proceedings came close, but was inadequate. Checking the hearings against his criteria, however, did serve a purpose, pointing me in a direction which, I believe, illuminates the function of the hearings in our society. I will not attempt to construct the genre or genres of which the Iran-contra hearings are a part, but instead focus on the celebratory aspects of the hearings. I do not necessarily advance the argument that the hearings are best described as epideictic rhetoric, but rather that we can gain significant insights into the hearings by using celebration as a perspective--a set of (rose?) colored lenses--through which to view them. Then we can step back and see what this particular vantage yields, see how it advances our understanding of these hearings, American society and politics, and of the epideictic genre. This reflects Campbell and Jamieson's view that "Classification is justified only by the critical illumination it produces, not by the neatness of a classificatory schema."[4]

I will begin by looking at some of the elements of epideictic rhetoric that have been proposed, including Halloran's specific work on celebration in public proceedings. With that as a basis, I will examine the Iran-contra hearings to illuminate both their epideictic aspects as well as the functions of those aspects.

Characteristics of Epideictic Rhetoric

Many others have examined what has been termed the "macro-genre" of epideictic.[5] Various aspects of the genre have been dismissed as inaccurate or not useful, and new conceptualizations and characteristics proposed.[6] Although there is little agreement on a precise definition of the genre, several characteristics reflect some degree of consensus. The following list of characteristics is not exhaustive, and attempts to reflect Miller's point that "a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centered not on the substance or the form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish."[7]

The Definition/Understanding Function

Condit posits that epideictic rhetoric serves to explain the social world of the community involved. This is particularly important "when some event, person, group, or object is confusing or troubling."[8] This is seen in traditional sub-genres of epideictic such as the eulogy.[9] The community is assured of the continued existence of its values and itself. Miller's alteration of Bitzer's concept of exigence further clarifies this function: "Exigence must be located in the social world. . . [it] is a form of social knowledge—a mutual construing of objects, events, interests, and purposes that not only links them but also makes them what they are: an objectified social need."[10]

Although Aristotle's conception of epideictic as being primarily concerned with the present has been dismissed as overly simple, Beale's explanation of epideictic as present-centered fits well with Condit's definition/understanding function. He states that epideictic rhetoric tends "to be informed by the 'present' in very special ways, often taking their very

subjects and forms from the 'present' actions or ceremonies in which they are embedded, and often serving to bolster faith or pride in the ideals of the 'present system,' or assessing 'where we are now' as a community."[11] While reconciling the Aristotelian view of epideictic, Beale also points to the next function of the genre, concerning community values.

Value Clarification, Reinforcement, and Reassurance

Epideictic rhetoric serves an essential function regarding the values that bind the community together. Discussed by Perelman and Tyteca, this function is also consistent with Condit's "shaping and sharing of community." Such epideictic orations as Fourth of July addresses serve to bind a community together by reminding its members of the ideals, beliefs, and standards they share. In times of crisis, such as might be addressed by a eulogy, the community is reassured that these values are still valid, continuing to serve their purpose, and that the community will survive the current shake-up. Perelman and Tyteca point to the fact that epideictic rhetoric, by reinforcing community values, lays the groundwork for later argumentation.[12] Additionally, it is always necessary for community values to be adapted to new situations, whether because of gradual change or sudden crises.[13]

Praise and Blame

Another Aristotelian characteristic of the genre is a concern with praise and blame. Although this is not a unique characteristic, it does serve a unique epideictic function because we define ourselves and our values--what is good--by contrasting it with what is bad.[14] Condit further explains this function: "The community renews its conception of good and evil by

explaining what it has previously held to be good or evil and working through the relationships of those past values and beliefs with new situations."[15] Again, we see the importance of epideictic and its functions in times of community crisis.

The Performative Function

The last general function of epideictic I will examine before moving on to the specific functions it serves in public proceedings and hearings is the performative aspect. Aristotle pointed out that in epideictic situations the audience takes on the role of observer, as opposed to judge or decision-maker. This provides the basis for Beale's definition of epideictic as rhetorical performative: "[The] act of rhetorical discourse which does not merely say, argue, or allege something about the world of social action, but which constitutes (in some special way defined by the conventions or customs of a community) a significant social action in itself."[16] Using speech act theory as a framework, Beale posits that the act of saying something is more important than what is actually said in epideictic rhetoric.[17] It is the performance as a whole that often serves to define the community, to reassure the members of its continuance and its values.

Epideictic Aspects of Public Hearings

Many of the epideictic features of public proceedings (and generally, by default, public hearings) outlined by Halloran reflect the characteristics outlined above. In a public proceeding, (1) the body must be representative in that it mirrors the community and its values; (2) the precise content is not the most important aspect; (3) an inevitable degree of "staging" occurs; (4) there is a ritualistic quality; and (5) legitimacy plays a crucial role.[18]

For our purposes, the most significant element on this list is legitimacy.

Legitimacy is related to the body's representativeness. Halloran explains that this representation is two-fold. First, the body must be representative in a technical sense—they must have the authority to conduct the hearing based on law, precedent, and their elected or appointed status. Second, the body must be representative of their community and its values; it must be acceptable to the community. Halloran elaborates:

> The authority of the body conducting the proceeding. . .rests on an implicit agreement in the community, an agreement formalized in the customs, laws, and procedures of election or appointment that constitute the body's mandate. While at a given moment the agreement might seem solid and enduring, history suggests that it is really quite fragile.[19]

Legitimacy can become crucial because if the body is not seen as legitimate, then the epideictic functions of the hearing may not be carried out—the community may not be sufficiently convinced that it will survive a crisis, that its values are still intact and/or valid. From the performative aspect, the hearing can be seen as false, the mere act of its occurrence no longer a sufficient guarantee. Although we do not tend to think of epideictic situations as argumentative, as Halloran points out, an important part of a public proceeding (or hearing) can be a debate over the legitimacy of the body.[20] This can include not only its representativeness, but whether it is complying with its mandates, completing the function it is supposed to fulfill, i.e., accurately reporting the facts it discovers, making its decisions based on truth instead of political expediency, and the like. Oravec makes a

similar point in her expansion of Aristotle's "observation" function: "Therefore the function of 'observation' is. . .to evaluate the credibility of the tale--its verisimilitude--in light of. . .the generally accepted values of virtue and nobility."[21]

With this outline of some functions and characteristics of epideictic rhetoric, let us proceed to an application of these to the Iran-contra hearings.

Celebration in the Iran-contra Hearings

In undertaking a generic analysis of the hearings, which requires close textual analysis, I decided to limit myself to certain significant portions of the hearings. I first chose the opening and closing statements of the senators and representatives involved, partially because I expected these statements to define the hearing's purposes and to "set the tone." I also looked at the entire testimonies of Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North and Secretary of State George Schultz. These were some of the more significant persons involved and drew heavy media and popular attention, thus providing good examples for my purposes.[22] What follows is my findings from these sections of the hearings in terms of the characteristics and functions described above, although in applying that body of work to these hearings, I have liberally combined, separated, renamed, and reorganized the functions and characteristics.

Celebration of Values and Community

One epideictic function apparent in the Iran-contra hearings was a celebration of democratic/American values. Throughout the hearings, the senators and representatives, as well as witnesses and counsel, quoted past

Presidents and "the Founding Fathers," praised the Constitution (increased in frequency by the celebrations surrounding the bicentennial of the Constitution which were occurring at the time), and otherwise extolled the virtues of liberty, democracy and the American system of government.[23] Secretary Schultz spoke of the American values of freedom and the rule of law, calling the United States a "special country."[24] An excellent example of this straight-forward celebratory rhetoric was given by Senator Inouye, Chair of the Senate Select Committee, in his opening remarks:

> . . . 200 years ago, the framers of our Constitution provided for a more perfect union by establishing a strong national government built on a system of checks and balances. . . . The unique genius of the American system was that by dividing power, it promoted sound policy based on reasoned and open discourse and mutual trust between the branches.[25]

Such celebratory remarks appear throughout the hearings, both implicitly and explicitly. Their independent occurrence as "pure" celebration should be noted, for as Edelmann pointed out: "The themes a society emphasizes and re-emphasizes about its government may not accurately describe its politics, but they do at least tell us what men [and women] want to believe about themselves and their state."[26]

Celebration as a Response to Crisis

As was mentioned above, a common thread in many of the characteristics of epideictic rhetoric seems to be that it often occurs at a time of crisis in the community. This manifests itself in three related themes which

appeared throughout the Iran-contra hearings: (1) the dangerous nature of the events leading up the the hearings; (2) assurances of community continuance; and (3) the purpose of the hearings. The first two are directly intertwined--there are statements about the dangers posed to our system of government by the people and events in the Iran-contra scandal, and yet, despite these threats, those involved in the hearings clearly point out that we can overcome the threats and dangers by having the hearings to get the facts out and by keeping faith in our democratic system. Statements about the purpose of the hearings tie in here as well because they often refer to the "self-cleansing" or "rebuilding" process needed to protect us against the dangers posed to our system now and in the future, and thereby to the process to follow in order to insure the continuance of the community and its values.

Dangers. Although statements about the problem--the threats posed by the scandal--are not as prevalent as statements of assurance and purpose, they do occur several times throughout the testimony reviewed. Two statements near the end of Oliver North's testimony, although extreme, illustrate this theme. The first is from Representative Brooks:

> Instead of operating within rules and law, we have been supplying lethal weapons to terrorist nations; trading arms for hostages; involving the US government in military activities in direct contravention of the law; diverting public funds into private pockets and secret unofficial activities; selling access to the President for thousands of dollars; dispensing cash and foreign money orders out of a White House safe; accepting gifts and falsifying papers to cover it up; altering and shredding National

> Security documents; lying to the Congress. Now I believe that the American people understand that democracy cannot survive that kind of abuse.[27]

Representative Stokes made a similar statement and concluded by saying, "In my opinion it is a prescription for anarchy in a democratic society."[28]

Such statements of threats and dangers to the community are, on one hand, necessary if the event is to be attached any significance. They may also serve to reflect the perceived sentiments of the community at large, as the speaker must appear to represent the beliefs and values of the community, as was pointed out earlier. But we also can explain them in terms of the characteristics outlined above. Specifically, it was shown how Aristotle's "praise and blame" can be used in an epideictic sense as a means of establishing what is right and proper by contrasting it with what is wrong and improper. By emphasizing the dangers of the philosophies and actions of North, Poindexter, and others, the participants in the hearings can better explain and demonstrate the proper operation of government that they wish to maintain or achieve. It is this ideal that they repeatedly assure the audience will be restored.

Assurances. It is significant, particularly when viewed from a epideictic viewpoint, that statements of assurance seemed far more prevalent than statements about the dangers posed to our democratic system and values. The statements about the threats were needed to remind the public of the seriousness of the situation, or to make them aware of it. However, from an epideictic standpoint, the emphasis needed to be placed on assurances about our values, our system of government, and our continued existence as a community. These assurances were accomplished in a variety

of ways. First, the hearings, through investigation and presentation of the facts, will safeguard our democratic system of government. For example, Representative Hamilton, Chair of the House Select Committee, in his closing remarks stated: "I view these hearings and other investigations of these events as an essential part of the self-cleansing process of our system of government. . . . As a result of these inquiries, the process of restoring our institutions is already well advanced."[29] Many similar remarks were made regarding the purpose of the hearings as well, as will be shown below.

A second means of assuring the community of the safety and security of a democratic government was accomplished through the testimony of individuals in government who were not a part of the questionable activities. Throughout Secretary Schultz's testimony, for example, both he and members of the committees stressed his vocal opposition to the trading of arms for hostages and his ignorance of the diversion of the profits to the contras. This functioned to assure the American people that there were still those in government who acted according to rules and laws. Senator Sarbanes stated:

> And I simply want to close, Mr. Secretary, by observing that in my view, the most salutary feature of your testimony over the last few days is that you have exhibited. . .that you understand how American democracy should work, that you understand the vital and essential proposition that in seeking to achieve one's policy views, no one is entitled to go outside the constitutional process. . . . And because you have demonstrated, particularly in

this year of the Bicentennial of the American Constitution, your understanding of our system, I'm grateful to you for your testimony.[30]

Representative Stokes, Senator Nunn, and others also praised Schultz for his testimony and his record as Secretary of State.[31] In this light, the apparent conclusion of the hearings that President Reagan did not know of the diversion of funds and did not view the arms shipments to Iran as a trade for hostages would also serve as a reassurance.

Secretary Schultz also sought to assure the American people that our overall foreign policy was still in line with our values and publicly stated policies.[32] An excellent example of his statements in this regard comes in response to a statement by Representative Hyde:

Mr. HYDE. Mr. Secretary. . .I think you have painted a picture in its darkest terms of a foreign policy in disarray, there is no gainsaying that, a President—

Secretary SCHULTZ. I certainly have not. I have tried to paint a picture of a foreign policy that is strong and successful, and we have a problem here that you have been investigating where things went badly, but the general foreign policy picture is a very strong and positive one.[33]

Schultz stressed that the Iran-contra activities had remained somewhat contained, and therefore had not detrimentally affected the rest of the execution of U.S. foreign policy.

A similar way in which the American people were assured of the continued functioning of their government was what I term "business as

usual." By this I mean that periodically the presiding Chair would inform members of the House or Senate that a vote was taking place and that those members would have to be absent for a while.[34] Although I am not suggesting that these were staged, they served the function of assuring the people watching that other Congressional business had not come to a halt as a result of the hearings; business was still being conducted, as evidenced by periodic votes in both houses.

A more direct and significant means by which the American people were assured of the strength and integrity of our system of government and values was by pointing out that the simple fact that the hearings were transpiring was proof of the goodness of our system. Senator Inouye, in his opening statement, said: "By eliciting and examining the entire story, we believe our nation will emerge stronger. We also believe that sunlight is the best disinfectant. Our country is not divided or dissipirited. These hearings do not represent democracy's weakness, but its strength."[35] Senator Rudman, in his opening statement, similarly stated that: "These hearings, while laying out an unfortunate affair, *will also serve as a reminder of the fundamental strength of the American system*. This investigation and these hearings demonstrate the self-corrective nature of our democratic government" (emphasis added).[36] These statements and many others made throughout the course of the hearings seem to suggest that the fact that the hearings are occurring is, in itself, an assurance of community survival.

This relates back to the performative aspect of epideictic rhetoric. The actual act--more than the specific content--is what is presented as significant to the audience, the community that has been shaken in some

way. The existence of an investigation is, by and of itself, an assurance that the system is operating properly.[37] To return again to Senator Inouye, this time from his statement at the conclusion of North's testimony:

> Your support or opposition of what is happening in this room is important--important because it dramatically demonstrates the strength of this democracy. . . . I've always felt that, as long as we daily reaffirm our belief in and support of our Constitution and the great principles of freedom that was long ago enunciated by our Founding Fathers, we'll continue to prevail and flourish.[38]

This view of the hearings as a performance is consistent not only with Beale's conception of epideictic, but with Halloran's point that in instances such as these, the precise content is not as important as the overall act. The hearings can be viewed as a social act whose meaning is inherent in the act itself. To recall Beale's definition of a rhetorical performative: "[The] act of rhetorical discourse which does not merely say, argue, or allege something about the world of social action, but which constitutes (in some special way defined by the conventions or customs of a community) a significant social action in itself." The significance of the event can be established in a variety of way, including the heavy media attention, as well as the points I have brought up here. And certainly in a democracy, a public hearing and investigation, sanctioned and laid out by the Constitution as a part of the system of checks and balances, is defined as a significant event.

Although not a part of the hearings themselves, the final published report of the committees provides support for this point. Out of the 690 pages of the report, just over four pages are devoted to recommendations

(inclusion of the recommendations of the minority report would add three pages). Although some of the recommendations are directed at those agencies involved in the scandal, many are minor or involve Congressional procedures. The report and the committees chose not to put great emphasis on their recommendations and did not stress the need for far-reaching changes in procedures and laws. In fact, the recommendations section of the majority report states: "Thus, the principal recommendations emerging from the investigation are not for new laws but for a renewal of the commitment to constitutional government and sound processes of decisionmaking."[39] Again, this adds credence to the epideictic viewpoint that what was more important was that these hearings occur (and, of course, at least appear valid and genuine), not that they come to the conclusion that a large-scale overhaul of our system of government is required.

A relatively small detail in the hearings provides more support for this point. Throughout the public phases of the hearings, many of the countries involved were assigned numbers, and this "code" was used in the discussions so as to protect secrets and prevent possible political embarrassment. This certainly functions to make the hearings appear legitimate, but it also illustrates again that significant details were unavailable to the public. The epideictic performance, however, could still function to reassure the community.

Purpose. The third general theme related to the epideictic response to crisis is the purpose of the hearings. Many of the statements made about the purpose of the hearings reflect the previous point that it is the act of the hearings itself which is important. They also clearly reflect the idea

that the hearings are to reassure the American people and to return things to normal.

Many of the more straight-forward and simple statements regarding the purpose of the hearings reflect the same basic theme: to get the facts out in the open, before the American people. For example, Senator Trible said, "Our duty is to light a candle so the American people can see and judge what has gone on. It's not an easy job or a happy one, but it is what must be done."[40] These not only reflect the idea that such a process will preserve our democratic system, but again serve as a reinforcement to those watching that the hearings are being conducted with a valid purpose and that, because of that, they can rest assured that the system is operating properly. This is reflected in the statement of John Nields, Chief Counsel for House Select Committee: "And it is a principal purpose of these hearings to replace secrecy and deception with disclosure and truth."[41]

Beyond these rather simple statements of purpose, many participants also stated that the hearings were a part of the "self-cleansing process... a process to reinvigorate and restore our system of government."[42] Senator Heflin stated this epideictic purpose of reassurance, consistent with Beale's performative perspective, in his opening statement:

> We are here today to begin a process of investigation, of affirmation, and of restoration. A legislative investigation in a democracy can be a salutary event. Done properly, it can have a cleansing effect. If there is corruption or malfeasance, it can open it up, expose it, cleanse it—and, importantly, begin the process of healing.[43]

Senator Rudman stated another way in which the hearings would assure the audience of the government's legitimacy: "The purpose of the hearings, it seems to me, is to show the American people what happened and to also show them that there are people in this government who function the way the Constitution envisions the government should function."[44]

In addition to simply restoring order, specific democratic values which were endangered needed bolstering, as Senator Heflin pointed out in his opening statement: "These hearings are about Iran and contras, but they are also about affirming some fundamental American values: honesty, openness, truth, credibility, and the sacred covenant of a trust a President makes with the American people when he asks for and receives their vote. . . ."[45] Senator Tribie called for faith: "These hearings today involve far more than people and arms and policy and law. More profoundly, ours is an act of keeping faith—for faith in our institutions, by those who govern and by those who are governed, is the very foundation of this republic."[46] And Representative Boland reinforces the idea that the specifics are not as important as the overall values: "But perhaps this, our Constitution's bicentennial year, is not the worst time to remind the American people that there are principles which are intended to guide this Nation's government and *which are more important than the exigencies of the day*" [emphasis added].[47]

Legitimacy

Halloran pointed out that legitimacy is a significant consideration in the epideictic side of public proceedings. In the Iran-contra hearings, legitimacy was argued by both committee members and witnesses and from a variety of positions, from endangering the community and certain

individuals to a lack of representativeness. Yet from an epideictic stance, it was crucial for the body to appear legitimate to the public in order for it to serve its primary purpose of assurance.

North attacked the legitimacy of the hearings on four basic points. First, both he and his lawyer repeatedly stated that the hearings were compromising North's right to a fair trial, giving the special prosecutor an unfair advantage despite the conditions of limited immunity.[48] Second, he continually emphasized that sensitive information was either being discussed in public sessions or that it would be leaked from executive sessions by loose-lipped members of the committees.[49] Third, North stated that executive privilege ought to have protected he and others who served under the President from having to testify.[50] Fourth, North stated that the Congress was being self-serving and unfair in the manner in which they were conducting the hearings. The best example of this last attack on legitimacy came in North's opening statement (delivered on the third day of his testimony due to Congressional rules):

> I believe this is a strange process you are putting me and others through. Apparently, the President has chosen not to assert his prerogatives, and you have been permitted to make the rules. You called before you officials of the Executive Branch. You put them under oath for what must be collectively thousands of hours of testimony. You dissect that testimony to find inconsistencies and declare some to be truthful and others to be liars. You make rulings as to what is proper and what is not proper. You put the testimony which you think is helpful to your goals up before the people and leave others out. It's sort of like a baseball game in

which you are both the player and the umpire. It's a game in which you call the balls and strikes and where you determine who is out and who is safe. And in the end you determine the score and declare yourselves the winner.[51]

Chairman Inouye responded to the accusations in North's opening statement, in part stating:

> I wish the record to show that the panel did not amend, delete, or strike out any word, or words--or phrases from this opening statement. Furthermore, we did not put on testimony words which we thought were helpful to our goals and leave the rest out. I am certain you will agree with me, Colonel, that every word you wanted to present to the people of the United States was presented.[52]

Inouye also repeated statements to the effect that no classified information had been revealed or leaked as a result of the hearings.[53] Both Chairman Hamilton and Senator Sarbanes made statements about the fairness of both the hearings as a whole and Inouye's judgments.[54] And on the issue of executive privilege, Representative Cheney stated: "Congress clearly has a legitimate role of oversight in reviewing the conduct of foreign policy by the Administration and the President himself supported these activities and encouraged us to form these select committees."[55]

It is interesting to note that Cheney, the ranking House Republican and an overall sympathizer with the President's policies, particularly in regards to Central America, emphasized the legitimacy of the hearings. Although many

of the members made short statements and implications about the illegitimacy or poor handling of the hearings, few emphasized these points or repeated them. One of the few direct statements against the legitimacy of the body was made by Senator Hatch:

> I think, frankly, we have overdone it. We have become obsessed with this affair. . .as much as a certain small segment of our country seems to want to keep this controversy alive, I have a strong belief the average American doesn't feel that way at all. In my frequent travels back home to Utah, for example, I get the real feeling that the vast majority of Americans out there are sick and tired of hearing about this affair.[56]

Besides this attack on the body's representativeness, Hatch also reinforced North's attacks on disclosure of secrets and the threat to his right to a fair trial.[57]

Despite this and some of the other less significant statements made by other members, it seems as if the members were hesitant to call the legitimacy of the hearings into question, even if the outcomes and information presented were harmful to their personal or partisan positions on the issues. On one hand, this could suggest a true spirit of bipartisanship, a claim advanced by many throughout the hearings.[58] But it also suggests that there was a reluctance to do so because it would endanger a primary purpose of the hearings: a reassurance of values and community continuance.

In addition, the conflicts among and between members, witnesses, and counsel serves to increase the legitimacy of the body and the investigation.

The existence of disagreement and conflict "proves" the sincerity of the hearings to fulfill their investigatory function. Without some degree of clash, it would not appear genuinely political or true to its fact-finding mission.

Conclusions

The first conclusion that can be drawn, and which of course has been assumed throughout, is that the Iran-contra hearings are indeed an example of epideictic rhetoric, although this does not deny the existence of other genres and their attendant characteristics and functions. And it appears that the primary epideictic function, at least in this instance, is that of reassurance--that the community, its values, and its system of government will endure the crisis. What is most interesting about this function is that it may have been accomplished largely by means of what Beale terms the rhetorical performative: the mere act of the hearings, defined by our system and made by our media into a significant event, could accomplish this reassuring function. Specific content may be important only so long as it adds to the appearance of legitimacy. Certainly from this perspective, the formality, the length, and the extensive television coverage were crucial ingredients in the hearing's perceived validity. This is not to imply that the audience is easily duped. Oravec points out that epideictic audiences judge the validity of the presentation: "Epideictic may be understood as a process of perception and comprehension through which the audience judges the competence of the speaker to make judgments about the praiseworthy and blamable and, in turn, receives insight into those objects of praise."[39]

This analysis also illustrates and supports several important points about our political system and the role of epideictic rhetoric within it.

First, it reminds us, as Edelmann points out, that a central function of our political institutions is "to quiet resentments about particular political acts, reaffirm belief in the fundamental rationality and democratic character of the system. . . ."[60] Second, it specifically demonstrates that public proceedings and hearings such as this dramatize "a model of community. . . . If the model presented has validity, if it rings true and seems to touch a living tradition, it can articulate a spirit that enlivens the sense of community."[61] Thus, the perceived legitimacy and validity of such public political acts are of critical importance.

Third, the epideictic perspective illuminates for us a fundamental irony (and strength?) of the democratic system. These hearings, by responding to negative, supposedly dangerous activities within the government, serve to strengthen the system. They provide an excellent time for community values to be reinforced, for the public to be reminded of the overall outstanding nature of its government and the majority of individuals within it. In this self-reinforcing system, there is only one danger—legitimacy. If the body conducting the proceeding or hearing fails to appear legitimate, the impact of a "faked" investigation, piled on top of the original dangerous actions, could spell disaster for the system and the public's faith in it. As Halloran pointed out: "What may be at stake in a public proceeding is the communion that makes community possible."[62]

Thus we see why the members of the committees did not seem overly eager to endanger the overall legitimacy of the hearings. As Halloran pointed out, in the Watergate impeachment proceedings, although some of the members did directly attack the legitimacy of the body (via its *ethos*, much as did North), even some opposed to impeachment apparently saw the

danger in such tactics and chose safer methods, even at the loss of effectiveness.[63] In the case of the Iran-contra hearings, I would posit that the epideictic aspect was a more significant part of the overall rhetorical and political event. The Iran-contra hearings did not include the "official action" of a vote on impeachment, but instead had the investigation (the hearings themselves) and a report which deemphasized its recommendations. The overall purpose and function of the hearings from a celebratory standpoint is summarized by the following statement from Secretary Schultz:

> First of all, I sense an instinct here in the committee that you need to go through all of the details and ins and outs of what has been brought before you, but what you really want to do is raise yourselves up out of these details and reflect on the meaning and what is to be done to make our wonderful system of government as good as it can possibly be. And I welcome that instinct.[64]

In addition to our political system and the hearings themselves, this analysis also has implications for the epideictic genre. To begin, this third genre should not be dismissed as less important than the deliberative and judicial genres. Even if it was less important in Aristotle's time (an oft contested point[65]), its function in contemporary society is significant, perhaps intensified by the need to tie together such a large and diverse community. Second, it is indeed a genre concerned with the persuasion of audiences, not just entertainment and celebration. Third, the combination of all three of the traditional genres in a situation such as this suggests both the complexity of the rhetorical event and the dangers of over-

simplification. This rhetorical situation may represent an ultimate genre of "democratic discourse," typifying the need to strengthen the community in the course of any major political/rhetorical event. If nothing else, the Iran-contra hearings certainly reinforce the power and necessity of epideictic rhetoric in contemporary American political rhetoric.[66]

NOTES

[1] Michael Halloran, "Doing Business in Public," in Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action, ed. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (Falls Church, Virginia: Speech Communication Association, 1978), pp. 118-138.

[2] For example, see Wm. S. Broomfield, "Opening Statement," in Joint Hearings Before the Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition and the House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran: Testimony of Richard V. Secord, U.S. 100th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, D. C.: GPO, 1987), pp. 15-16; and George J. Mitchell, "Opening Statement," Joint Hearings: Secord, p. 11. See also applicable quotations presented under "purpose" section.

[3] Halloran, p. 119.

[4] Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, "Form and Genre in Rhetorical Criticism: An Introduction," in Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action, ed. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (Falls Church, Virginia: Speech Communication Association, 1978), pp. 9-32.

[5] Celeste Michelle Condit, "The Functions of Epideictic: The Boston Massacre Orations as Exemplar," Communication Quarterly, 33 (1985), 284.

[6] For instance, Condit; Bernard K. Duffy, "The Platonic Function of Epideictic Rhetoric," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 16(1983), 79-93; Walter H. Beale, "Rhetorical Performative Discourse: A New Theory of Epideictic," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 11(1978), 221-246; Christine Oravec, "Observation in Aristotle's Theory of Epideictic," Philosophy and Rhetoric, 9 (1976), 162-174; and Carolyn R. Miller, "Genre as Social Action," Quarterly Journal of

Speech, 70 (1984), 151-167.

7 Miller, p. 151.

8 Condit, p. 288.

9 See, for example, Karen A. Foss, "John Lennon and the Advisory Function of Eulogies," Central States Speech Journal, 34 (1983), 187-194.

10 Miller, p. 157.

11 Beale, p. 223.

12 Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), p. 50.

13 Condit, p. 297.

14 Condit, p. 291.

15 Condit, p. 291.

16 Beale, p. 225.

17 Beale, p. 232.

18 Halloran, pp. 122, 126, 127.

19 Halloran, p. 121.

20 Halloran, p. 123.

21 Oravec, pp. 168-169.

22 My choices of which sections of the hearings to use in my analysis were not entirely voluntary. At this point in time, the transcripts of the hearings available from the GPO is still severely limited due to difficulties in their new privatization policy, the only sections available through normal channels being the testimony of Schultz, Meese, and small portions of North and McFarlane. North's testimony is available in full commercially because of his popularity. I was able to obtain copies of the opening statements of

all the members and the closing statements of the chair and ranking minority member of each committee through Representative Dick Cheney of Wyoming, to whom I give my thanks as he was the only one of many members of Congress I wrote which provided me with transcripts.

23 For example, see Mitchell, Taking the Stand: The Testimony of Lieutenant Colonel Oliver L. North (New York: Pocket Books, 1987), pp. 536-537; Paul S. Sarbanes, Taking the Stand, p. 580; Jack Brooks, Taking the Stand, pp. 643-644; Stokes, Taking the Stand, p. 696; Henry J. Hyde, Taking the Stand, p. 737; and Daniel K. Inouye, Taking the Stand, p. 749.

24 George P. Schultz, Joint Hearings Before the Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition and the House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran: Testimony of George P. Schultz and Edwin Meese, III, U.S. 100th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, D. C.: GPO, 1987), pp. 82, 93.

25 Inouye, "Opening Statement," in Joint Hearings: Richard Secord, p. 1.

26 Murray Edelmann, The Symbolic Uses of Politics (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1964), p. 191.

27 Brooks, Taking the Stand, p. 644.

28 Louis Stokes, Taking the Stand, p. 695.

29 Lee H. Hamilton, "Closing Statement," in Joint Hearings Before the Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition and the House Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran, as-yet-unpublished volume, U.S. 100th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, D. C.: GPO, 1987), pp. 161-162.

30 Sarbanes, Joint Hearings: George Schultz and Edwin Meese, p. 188.

31 Stokes, Joint Hearings: George Schultz and Edwin Meese, p. 155; Sam

Nunn, Joint Hearings: George Schultz and Edwin Meese, p. 162.

32 Schultz, pp. 52, 113.

33 Joint Hearings: George Schultz and Edwin Meese, p. 130.

34 For example, see Inouye, Taking the Stand, pp. 105, 167, 374, 425; Inouye, Joint Hearings: George Schultz and Edwin Meese, p. 56; and Hamilton, Joint Hearings: George Schultz and Edwin Meese, pp. 17, 87.

35 Inouye, "Opening Statement," in Joint Hearings: Richard Secord, p. 3.

36 Warren Rudman, "Opening Statement," in Joint Hearings: Richard Secord, p. 8.

37 Edelmann, p. 12.

38 Inouye, Taking the Stand, p. 752.

39 U.S. Cong., Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair, 100th Cong., 1st sess., S. Rept. 216, H. Rept. 433 (Washington, D. C.: GPO, 1987), p. 423.

40 Paul S. Trible, Taking the Stand, p. 539.

41 John Nields, Taking the Stand, p. 12.

42 Hamilton, Taking the Stand, p. 745.

43 Howell T. Heflin, "Opening Statement," in Joint Hearings: Richard Secord, p. 18.

44 Rudman, Joint Hearings: George Schultz and Edwin Meese, p. 68.

45 Heflin, "Opening Statement," in Joint Hearings: Richard Secord, p. 18.

46 Trible, "Opening Statement," in Joint Hearings: Richard Secord, p. 31.

47 Edward P. Boland, "Opening Statement," in Joint Hearings: Richard Secord, p. 34.

48 Oliver North, Taking the Stand, p. 235.

49 North, p. 267.

50 North, p. 211.

51 North, p. 264.

52 Inouye, Taking the Stand, p. 268.

53 Inouye, Taking the Stand, p. 268.

54 Hamilton, Taking the Stand, pp. 739-740; Sarbanes, Taking the Stand, pp. 736-737.

55 Dick Cheney, "Closing Statement," Joint Hearings (unpublished), p. 141.

56 Orin Hatch, "Opening Statement," Joint Hearings: Richard Secord, p. 29.

57 Hatch, Taking the Stand, pp. 565-566.

58 For example, Cheney, "Closing Statement," p. 140; and James A. McClure, "Opening Statement," Joint Hearings: Richard Secord, p. 13.

59 Oravec, p. 172.

60 Edelmann, p. 17.

61 Halloran, p. 123.

62 Halloran, p. 124.

63 Halloran, p. 132.

64 Schultz, p. 191.

65 See, for example, Oravec, p. 162.

66 Miller, p. 164.